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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine professional role performance difficulties for first year Illinois public school teachers (K-12) and the differences between these difficulties as reported by male and female teachers. There were 548 teachers (429 female and 119 male) who responded to the study. They were asked to express any difficulties with seven professional roles involving the teacher as: (1) planner; (2) director and helper of learning; (3) counselor and guide to the student; (4) mediator and interpreter of the culture; (5) link with the community; (6) member of the teaching profession; and (7) member of the school community. Conclusions drawn include: (1) Differences in male and female reports of role performance difficulty favored female teachers, who reported less difficulty than did male teachers; (2) Male and female teachers did not differ significantly in reports of role performance difficulties when reports were analyzed by the level of teacher assignment; and (3) Male and female teachers ranked in order of difficulty the seven professional roles similarly with two exceptions: the females ranked "teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture" as the most difficult while males ranked "teacher as director and helper of learning" as most difficult. (JM)

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Differences in Professional Role Performance Difficulties Reported by First Year Male and Female Public School Teachers

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Public education in the United States traditionally has been staffed mostly by female teachers. Especially has this condition prevailed at the lower grade levels. In the sample for the study reported here the ratio of female teachers to male teachers is 4:1.

In a historical review by Strober and Tyach (1980) many explanations regarding the predominence of females in the teaching profession are presented. Female teachers were assumed to exhibit the characteristics of motherhood and thereby to naturally provide nurturance, patience, and understanding of children more so than did males and thus they were thought to be better teachers than males. Traditionally, working directly with children has been perceived by many Americans as involving roles and behaviors more closely associated with being "female" than with being "male." Additionally, greater economic opportunity for males has been a factor drawing males away from teaching and resulting in more females than males following teaching as a career.

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However, it should be noted that males traditionally have been predominent in positions of management within public schools.

The evolution of specific concern for the professional difficulties of teachers is documented by Eddins (1930) "Why Teachers Fail"; Spears (1945) "What Disturbs the Beginning Teacher"; Wey (1951) "Why Do Beginning Teachers Fail"; and Ellis and Radebaugh (1974) in a follow-up study of teacher education graduates at Northern Illinois University. The aforementioned studies did not address the problems specific to the professional role performance differences between male and female teachers.

Problem of the Study

Do female public school teachers differ from male public school teachers in their report of difficulties encountered when performing seven professional roles inherent in public school teaching? It is this question which formed the problem of the study reported here.

Method of the Study

The study adherred to the descriptive survey method. A sample was systematically selected from a directory of first year school teachers who were teaching in Illinois public schools (exclusive of the Chicago public schools, for which a directory was not available) during the 1980-81 school year. From a population of 3,455 first year teachers; 1,571 were systematically selected to respond to the instrument of the survey. The total responses were 548 (429 females and 119 males). The respondents taught at grade levels K-12 and taught in eight curriculum areas of special education, art, mathematics, social studies, home economics, physical education, science, and English.

Data were obtained by a rating scale mailed to the first year teachers in which they were requested to rate and to rank difficulties associated with their performance of seven professional roles of a teacher during the school year 1980-81. The instrument of the study was based on the concept of teacher role performance (Kinney, 1952) and a scale developed by Ellis and Radebaugh (1974). For purpose of the study, teacher difficulties were defined as those difficulties which teachers perceive themselves to have in the performance of their professional roles and activities at a level of success satisfactory to them. These seven roles are briefly described below and on the following page.

Role I. The Teacher as Planner

Teachers identify and assess the needs and problems of both students and society. They identify, assess and state clearly defensible instructional objectives. They plan and develop appropriate learning materials and activities. They plan to assess and evaluate performance. They communicate and report the progress and needs of students. They plan for all of these activities to take place.

Role II. The Teacher as Director and Helper of Learning

Teachers work to help students learn. They plan, make decisions and take actions. They constantly and reflectively evaluate each activity and occurrence. Their actions involve getting ready for learning, interacting with the students and assessing both students and society.

Role III. The Teacher as Counselor and Guide to the Student

Throughout the entire mediating or teaching process teachers also give behavioral evidence that they believe in the students' potential as persons. Teachers work with students who have unique needs and problems which include a personal, social, emotional, moral physical and intellectual nature. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of the individual and her or his totality.

Role IV. The Teacher as Mediator and Interpretor of the Culture

Teachers and students belong to a specific culture which necessitates conscious awareness and critical examination. Teachers are responsible in a unique way to communicate clearly and reflectively the culture.

Role V. The Teacher as a Link with the Community

Teachers and students are a part of a cultural setting and both are involved with the culture through community needs, happenings, interpretations and customs. The very service and art of teaching necessarily link teachers to the community and the community to the teachers. Teachers help translate community values, needs and goals into school programs and communicate school programs to the community.

Role VI. The Teacher as a Member of the Teaching Profession

As a member of the teaching profession, teachers advocate and practice professional autonomy including the freedom to teach and to learn. They accept responsibility for their professional judgments, acts and conduct. They continue their professional growth and contribute to the further development of the profession.

Role VII. The Teacher as a Member of the School Community

As a member of the school community teachers relate to and share experiences with students, administrators, supervisors, other teachers and support personnel. They share in the general duties and responsibilities of the school and participate in efforts to improve the quality of programs and life in the school.

For each of the seven professional roles, specific activities essential for the performance of that role were identified and included in the instrument. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of difficulty, if any, that they had encountered performing each role and those activities associated with it during their first year of teaching.

The data were analyzed to describe frequencies and percents of teachers' responses regarding their professional role performance difficulties. The chi square (X^2) test of independence was used to determine the significance of the difference between the responses of the male and female teachers for each of seven roles. The X^2 test is a

"conservative" test when used with ordinal data. For the two roles where significant differences were not found by the application of the X^2, the Mann-Whitney U Test, a more powerful test than the X^2 for analyzing ordinal data, was used (Siegel, 1956). The level of significance was established at .05 or lower.

Results of the Study

Rating Role Performance Difficulties

Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the role performance difficulties they were experiencing. In Table I the overall difficulty rating by the females and males appears for each of the seven roles. From these data, it will be noted that over 50 percent of the males reported some degree of difficulty with the roles of teacher as planner, teacher as director and helper of learning, teacher as mediator and interpreted of the culture, and teacher as a link with the community. Over 50 percent of the females reported some difficulty with the roles of teacher as planner, teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture, and teacher as a link with the community. Both sexes reported the least role performance difficulties with the two roles of teacher as member of the teaching profession and teacher as member of the community. The role teacher as director and helper of learning was the one for which more than half (64.9%) of the males reported difficulty while less than half (48. 7%) of the females reported having difficulty.

In Table II the difficulty ratings provided by the male and female teachers are presented as "collapsed" categories and are compared by application of the X^2 test for independence to determine the significance of the difference between their ratings for each role.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY RATINGS OF FIRST YEAR FEMALE AND MALE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' REPORTS OF DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WHEN PERFORMING SEVEN PROFESSIONAL ROLES

N=548*
N= 429 Females N=119 Males

Teachers' Professional Roles	Role Performance Difficulty Rating															
	Little or None				Moderate				Considerable				Extreme			
	Females		Males		Females		Males		Females		Males		Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher as planner	197	46.5	39	33.9	213	50.2	69	60.0	13	3.1	7	6.1	1	0.2	0	0.0
The teacher as director and helper of learning	217	51.3	40	35.1	191	45.2	63	55.3	14	3.3	11	9.6	1	0.2	0	0.0
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student	271	64.1	61	52.6	139	32.9	45	38.8	12	2.8	10	8.6	1	0.2	0	0.0
The teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture	188	46.0	47	42.3	188	46.0	50	45.0	32	7.8	13	11.7	1	0.2	1	0.9
The teacher as a link with the community	137	33.7	29	25.9	221	54.3	63	56.3	46	11.3	19	17.0	3	0.7	1	0.9
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession	321	77.3	78	67.2	81	19.5	29	25.0	11	2.7	9	7.8	2	0.5	0	0.0
The teacher as a member of the school community	337	79.7	83	70.3	72	17.0	28	23.7	13	3.1	7	5.9	1	0.2	0	0.0

* All respondents did not respond to all itmes.

TABLE II

A COMPARISON OF FIRST YEAR FEMALE AND MALE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' REPORTS OF DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WHEN PERFORMING SEVEN PROFESSIONAL ROLES

N=548*

N=429 Females N=119 Males

Teachers' Professional Roles	Male and Female Role Performance Difficulty Reports Compared By Application of the X^2 Test of Significance of Difference				
		No Difficulty	Difficulty	X^2	
The teacher as planner	Male	39 33.9%	76 66.1%		
	Female	197 46.5%	227 53.5%	p =.021	Sig.
The teacher as director and helper of learning	Male	40 35.1%	74 64.9%		
	Female	217 51.3%	206 48.7%	p =.003	Sig.
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student	Male	61 52.6%	55 47.4%		
	Female	271 64.1%	152 35.7%	p =.032	Sig.
The teacher as mediator and interpretor of the culture	Male	47 42.3%	64 57.7%		
	Female	188 46.0%	221 54.0%	p =.566	NS
The teacher as link with the community	Male	29 25.9%	83 74.1%		
	Female	137 33.7%	270 66.3%	p =.148	NS
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession	Male	78 67.2%	38 32.8%		
	Female	321 77.3%	94 22.7%	p =.035	Sig.
The teacher as a member of the school community	Male	83 70.3%	35 29.7%		
	Female	337 79.7%	86 20.3%	p =.042	Sig.

* All respondents did not respond to all items.

Five of the seven roles demonstrated a significant difference at the .05 or lower level of confidence. These were teacher as; planner, director and helper, counselor and guide, member of the teaching profession and member of the school community. For each of these five roles the difference was found to favor the female teachers in that they reported having less difficulty performing these roles than did the males.

The two roles for which significant differences in reported difficulties were not found were "teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture" and "teacher as a link with the community." The data for these two roles were further analyzed by the more powerful Mann-Whitney U test (Siegel, 1956). In neither case did the Mann-Whitney analysis change the results of the X^2 analysis sufficiently enough to reach the desired level of significance.

Additionally, analysis of the male and female teacher role performance differences was made according to the level of the teachers' assignment; i.e., preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school. There were no males in the sample of preschool teachers, thus, a comparison was precluded at that level. For each of the other three levels, no significant differences were found when the X^2 test for independence was applied, although, as stated earlier, there were significant differences in five of seven comparisons when the group was analyzed as a whole (see Table II). This can be explained as follows. In the first role, "teacher as planner", the probability is only .021 that males nd females have the same level of difficulty. Yet, when the same role is broken down by assignment level the situation changes. With elementary teachers the significance is .948, while it is .106 with

middle school teachers and .119 with high school teachers. This discrepancy can be explained further by noting that in the overall group analysis the difference between males and females "gains in significance" from the fact that N = 539. In the breakdown by levels, however, N = 41, 159, 137 and 164, respectively (38 respondents did not specific their level and had to be excluded). With these lower Ns this male/female difference is more likely to be a chance function, hence the lowered p value.

Rank Role Performance Difficulties

After identifying and rating difficulties in their professional role performance, these first year public school teachers were asked to rank in order of difficulty the seven professional roles around which the study was structured. In Table III the results of their rankings appear for male and female teachers. In only two of the seven roles were the rankings by the two groups separated by more than one rank. Female teachers rank the role "teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture" as their most difficult role while male teachers ranked it as their fourth most difficult. Female teachers ranked the role "teacher as director and helper of learning" as their fourth most difficult role, while male teachers ranked it as their most difficult role.

When analyzed by the Spearman Rho Test, the strength of the association (correlation) between the female rankings and the male rankings of their role performance difficulties was found to be +.61. This moderately strong and positive relationship indicates a similarity of ranking of role performance difficulties for the two groups.

TABLE III

PROFESSIONAL ROLE PERFORMANCE DIFFICULTIES
RANKED IN ORDER OF DIFFICULTY BY
FEMALE AND MALE FIRST YEAR
ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

N=548
N=429 Females N=119 Males

Professional Roles	Roles Ranked in Order of Difficulty By Female and Male Teachers	
	Ranked by Females	Ranked by Males
The teacher as planner...	3	2
The teacher or director and helper of learning...	4	1
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student...	6	5
The teacher as mediator and interpretor of the culture...	1	4
The teacher as a link with the community...	2	3
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession...	7	7
The teacher as a member of the school community...	5	6

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The study sought to determine professional role performance difficulties of first year Illinois public school teachers assigned to preschool through high school levels. It further sought to identify differences between these difficulties as reported by male and female teachers.

It was not within the scope of this study to determine the reasons for differences between professional role performance difficulties reported by male and female teachers; however, the study does present a description of teacher ratings and rankings reported on a measure of their professional difficulties. Furthermore, a comparison of these male and female teachers' ratings and rankings was made to determine if there were significant differences in their reports of role performance difficulties. Additionally, the study is limited in that its sample did not include teachers from the Chicago schools and that the concept of "teaching" is structured around the seven professional roles for which data were obtained.

Conclusions

The findings warrant the following conclusions:

1. Most of the first year teachers who responded to the instrument of the study indicated that during the 1980-81 school year they had encountered difficulty performing some of their professional roles and activities.

2. Of the seven professional roles investigated in the study, first year public school teachers in Illinois reported the most difficulty in performing activities associated with the roles of "teacher as planner", "teacher as director and helper of learning", "teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture", and "teacher as a link with the community". They repoted the least difficulty in performing activities associated with the roles of "teacher as counselor and guide to

the student", "teacher as a member of the teaching profession", and "teacher as a member of the school community".

3. Male and female teachers in the study differed significantly in their report of role performance difficulties for five of the seven professional roles of the study. These differences favored the female teachers in that they reported less difficulty than did the male teachers.

4. Male and female teachers in the study did not differ significantly in their report of professional role performance difficulties when their reports were analyzed by the level of the teachers' assignments.

5. Male and female teachers in the study ranked in order of difficulty the seven professional roles similarly with two exceptions: female teachers ranked the "teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture" to be their most difficult role, while male teachers ranked "teacher as director and helper of learning" as their most difficult role.

Recommendations

Based upon the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations and implications for public school and university personnel are presented:

1. Those who are concerned with the professional development of teachers should take a careful look at the results of this and related studies to find feedback and a basis for both preservice and inservice education program revisions.

2. The differences between those professional role performance difficulties reported by male teachers and those reported by female teachers in the study should be used as both a rationale and a guide for being alert to the possible need to provide differential supervision and staff development activities for preservice and beginning male and female teachers.

3. Specific courses, workshops, and instructional materials to develop teacher competencies and skills in performing each of the seven professional roles with special emphasis on those roles in which the first year teachers reported the greatest difficulties, should be developed and, where warranted, presented differentially for males and females.

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